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Respect and Compassion

As a new teacher there are many questions that we must ask ourselves before entering the classroom on the first day. What are we going to teach the students, how are we going to handle those who have no willingness to learn, how are we actually going to teach them everything in our curriculum? But the biggest question we must ask ourselves is how we are going to create a compassionate classroom where students want to participate. Not just for a few, but for each and every student that enters that door on the first day. We as instructors have the mission and ability to not only show compassion on the first day when students are are anxious about the upcoming year, but to create a compassionate environment that is carried throughout.

But what is a compassionate classroom? What is this environment that we are trying to create for our students so that they are able to feel comfortable and willing to participate? How do we get them to a state of discussion about material and not a state of manipulation? This answer may vary from teacher to teacher, but for me the answer is simple, respect is the key to creating a compassionate classroom. With respect teachers will be able to take the classroom from steps one through four on the ladder to steps five and above.

The compassionate classroom is centered on respect. If there is a mutual respect in the classroom then all other principles of a compassionate classroom will fall into place. Teachers on the first day need to show that respect in the class is not an option, but something that is expected knowing that everyone in the class is a unique individual and should be treated in that way. I think a perfect example of this is our class in Schooling and Teaching in America.

I think that from the very moment we stepped into the classroom a sense of respect was created for the instructor as well as amongst the rest of us as co-teachers. We as co-teachers came up with on our own a circular seating arrangement. I believe that this circle was just the beginning of how we show each other respect. I think that this circle is a representation of respect because not one person is above or in front of everyone, rather we are all equal and sitting next each other. I believe that this circle creates a sense of openness so that everyone feels equal and respected. Because of this equality and respect people feel a sense of compassion and care coming from the other co-teachers making us feel more eager and at ease participating in this environment.

I feel another way that we have learned to pay respect to each other creating compassion is by introducing ourselves each class. I think that by going around, introducing our selves, and being able to say something about ourselves or our lives helps us to not only relate to other co-teachers, but to help others understand a piece of where we are coming from. I believe that this helps us to relate to one another and understand one another and with each of these components we are able to respect what we have to say and teach about during discussions. I think that this is the reason our discussions are able to thrive whether we are in a large class discussion or in small groups.

Once respect is achieved by members of the class so many other components of the compassionate class can fall into place. If there is respect in a classroom students will be encouraged to share new ideas and they will safe because they know that their fellow peers and you as a teacher genuinely care about their opinion and about what they think and have to say. In a respectful environment students will not have to worry about being laughed at by peers for getting answers wrong, rather they know if they do something incorrectly there will be someone there to help them get the right answer and see where they went astray.

If respect is the key to compassion in a classroom I believe the question is as a teacher how am I going to create a sense of respect for everyone that is around? To say I know how to do this exactly would be erroneous. However, I do believe that this class has helped to give me several ideas I can use in my classroom to create respect and compassion. I believe that the first step in achieving respect and compassion in a classroom can be accomplished by having optimism as a teacher. As a teacher you must seem passionate and love what you are doing. This will be seen by your students and will be contagious. If you truly and genuinely care about what you teach your students they will gain respect for you and hopefully share in the classroom. The next thing as a teacher you can do is be fun and refreshing. If you present things like chemistry in a new inventive way students are going to be more willing and eager to learn than if you teach them chemistry straight from the board and your overhead notes. If students are enjoying what they are doing they will be more willing to participate and more willing to respect what you are doing for them. However, as a teacher you cannot always be the cool one at the same time students like boundaries it is what they have known their whole lives so by giving them clear projects and rules they may be able to better understand the class and your authority. Where you might be “cool” but at the same time you are able to maintain professionalism and control of your class.

Not only as a teacher do we have to make sure students respect us, but they also need to respect each other if we want a compassionate classroom to be created. This is difficult because there will always be bullies and clicks and as teachers how do we stop this? How do we mix our students so everyone gets to know everyone and all can respect one another? I believe that I will draw my inspiration for this from the classroom that we have created in Schooling and Teaching in America. I believe that it was not said directly but encouraged for us to sit in new places each day next to new people. I think that this freedom to move allowed us to sit next to all kinds of different people whether they differ from us in race, gender, hobbies they participate in or major. I feel that as a teacher if we see clicks and bullying happen we stop it and indirectly make children intermingle and sit next to new people. I feel another way we learned to respect each other was by introducing ourselves each class. I feel that as a teacher if we start this practice with our class on the first day then respect will manifest. Simply knowing someone’s name and a random fact about them, for example, I know Sam plays viola, so I can ask her about her upcoming concerts, shows students that other people care enough to know about them and respect each other.

If students learn to respect one another and the teacher I believe that a compassionate classroom is created. Students and teacher will genuinely care about everyone else’s opinions and thoughts. This compassion will make it easy for others to participate. They will participate not because they have to; rather they will participate because they want the opportunity to share the ideas with the other members of the class. They will do this knowing that because they are respected their opinions will not be blown off, but taken seriously and discussed by all the other members of the class. Respect and the compassion it entails will help all teachers to get past steps one through four on the ladder and move toward a classroom that is more like steps five and above.